



U.S. Mission to the UN Agencies in Rome



Northern Uganda and Ethiopia

Where Peace and Plenty Remain Elusive



A Report from the Field
By Carla Benini

USUN Rome
Mission Trip Reports

March 16-23, 2005





Table of Contents

- Summary..... 2
- Northern Uganda:
 - The Forgotten Crisis 3
 - A Search for Peace..... 3
 - Returning Soldiers to their Childhood..... 4
 - The Night Commuters 4
 - Looking Ahead 5
- Ethiopia:
 - Risks and Rewards of a New Approach to Aid 6
 - Dangerous Road Ahead 6
 - Not Counted, Not Fed 7
 - A Model Program for the Urban Poor 7
 - Field of Hope..... 8
 - Looking Ahead..... 9
- Personal Comment from Ambassador Hall..... 9

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Northern Uganda and Ethiopia:

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Report from the Field

by Carla Benini

U.S. Mission to the UN Agencies for Food and Agriculture

The children of Northern Uganda are disappearing. They are being taken only a few at a time – some say 20 a day – but they are vanishing from their families just the same. More than 20,000 children have been abducted over the past 19 years by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), half of them stolen in the past three years.

To help shed light on this ongoing tragedy, and discuss U.S. efforts to alleviate the humanitarian crisis, Ambassador Tony Hall led a delegation into the bush of Northern Uganda, to a place called Gulu. Joined by USUN Rome's Public Affairs Officer Carla Benini, USAID Program Specialist Phil Lamade and Agricultural

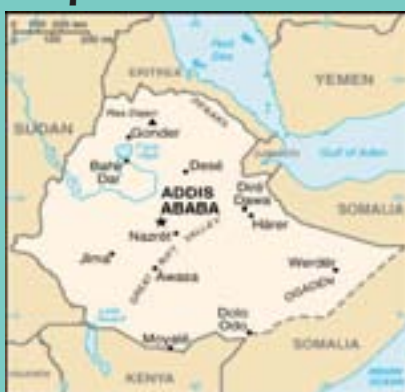
Advisor John Nakamura, the Ambassador teamed with U.S. Embassy and UN officials to see how humanitarian aid is helping the lives of 1.4 million internally displaced people (IDP) who are prisoners in their own country.

The delegation also traveled to Ethiopia, where a new approach to development aid is trying to take hold. Projects in the country's Oromiya region and in the capital of Addis Ababa demonstrated a great hope for change. However there is also a great potential for another food crisis.

Uganda



Ethiopia





Bags of U.S. food aid are unloaded from trucks and into warehouses for World Food Program's operations in Northern Uganda.

Northern Uganda: The Forgotten Crisis

Since 1986 the Lord's Resistance Army, led by Joseph Kony, has waged an insurgency in Northern Uganda that has displaced nearly 95 percent of the ethnic Acholi population in the three main northern districts. The rebels move in small units, roaming the bush and randomly selecting villages to torch, people to mutilate and children to steal for forced labor and sexual servitude. In fact, just hours before the delegation's arrival in Gulu, seven women in a neighboring district had their breasts and lips cut off by LRA rebels.

The atrocities occurring in the North happen far from much of the economic growth that has taken place in the rest of the country. Thanks to reforms, Uganda achieved relatively high economic growth during the 1990s, but growth slowed to 4.9 percent in 2003 and per capita income is still only \$330. While the population living in poverty declined from 56 percent in 1992 to 38 percent in 2002, high

population growth, now at 3.4 percent, is eroding economic growth, deepening poverty, and countering other achievements in social sectors.

Meanwhile, Northern Uganda is frozen in a time warp, where people are unable to return to their farms and their livelihoods because of the security situation. Unfortunately, while living in the camps may be safer than rural life, the abductions and mutilations often are waged upon camp inhabitants as well. In just the district of Gulu, 85 percent of its 528,000 inhabitants live in some 50 IDP camps. Of those in the IDP camps, 75 percent live below the poverty line.

The United States has security and humanitarian interests in helping Uganda tackle its economic and social problems. The success of the comprehensive peace agreement in Southern Sudan is being aided by the Ugandan military's push to root out LRA camps in that region, thus contributing to overall stability. Stable political and improved economic conditions in Uganda and the East African region will prevent terrorism from flourishing there. Uganda has been a model in the fight against HIV/AIDS, poverty reduction, and economic reform, and is a strong ally in the war against terrorism. Promoting democracy and good governance, resolving conflict, developing human capacity, and expanding economic opportunity and growth in Uganda are consistent with U.S. national interests.

A Search for Peace

Joined by U.S. Embassy Uganda and UN officials and international journalists, Ambassador Hall met with one of Gulu's key representatives in its effort to find a peaceful end to the crisis. District Commissioner Walter Ochora Odoch began the meeting by saying, "American taxpayers have done a lot for us in the past 19 years."

Odoch had just returned from The Hague where a Ugandan delegation met with the chief prosecutor from the International Criminal Court (ICC). "We need peace first and then justice," he said regarding his concern that by prosecuting LRA rebels in the ICC Uganda would put into question the validity of

Northern Uganda and Ethiopia: Where Peace and Plenty Remain Elusive

the government's offer of amnesty.

"The people have suffered enough. We had been a food basket for many years. Now we're lining up for food," said Odoch. Hall asked for his thoughts on why the war has been going on for so many years. Odoch said that the Acholi people know that if they reveal the whereabouts of the LRA, they will undoubtedly face retribution.

Returning Soldiers to their Childhood

Addressing the problem of reintegrating formerly abducted children is the Gulu Support the Children Organization (GUSCO) Reception Center. Organized in 1994 by three mothers, GUSCO has received, rehabilitated and reintegrated over 5,000 children since 1994. Through a USAID grant to Save the Children Denmark, some children have been provided tools and equipment, e.g., sewing machines, bicycle repair kits, building and carpentry tools, and seed money to start small enterprises.

As kids sang songs and skipped on a playground, the group listened to stories of how children come to arrive at GUSCO. The LRA abducts kids as young as two months, so they can be raised among the rebels. Boys begin their training to become killers at age 8, girls are stolen at age 11 to become child brides and bear children. "Children are the victims and the victimizers," said one GUSCO volunteer.

During their three to four week stay at GUSCO, kids typically have periods where they have nightmares,

don't talk, have problems concentrating and become aggressive. We were introduced to three child survivors between ages 13 and 25. They retold their horrific stories to the group of strangers, managing only to look down at their fidgeting fingers. They were forced to walk for miles in search of food for the rebels; one bore three children with one of the leaders; another spoke of being forced to kill another child who refused to work.

The Night Commuters

That night the delegation met and talked with some of the "night commuters" at Noah's Ark. Night commuters are children who travel to the main towns of northern Uganda on a nightly basis to seek refuge from insecurity and abduction. Noah's Ark has provided a safe haven for as many as 4,000, though only 700 to 1,000 were using the facility as of late.

Eerily reminiscent of a summer camp, the children were singing songs and working on crafts projects as the delegation walked among the corrugated aluminum structures that shelter the children at night. Former child soldiers play among others not old enough for kindergarten, many walking up to seven kilometers twice a day to stay at the commuter centers. Those walking the furthest distances commute from the camp to school and back to the camp, seeing their parents only on the weekends due to the amount of walking time.

"It's difficult to find balance between providing for kids but not making it so good that the parents want to send them here, no matter their security situation," said Juliet Cherukut, the well-spoken

U.S. Donates \$27 Million to Uganda

Amid the dozens of IDP camps of Gulu district, Ambassador Hall announced a US\$27 million donation of food aid for Uganda through the United Nations World Food Program. He shared with journalists, NGO and UN officials and future beneficiaries of the more than 40,000-ton donation that the U.S. commitment to help alleviate this humanitarian crisis is unwavering. "We will do whatever we can to make sure everyone receives a meal." The new contribution, made through the USAID Office of Food for Peace, supports displaced populations, therapeutic feeding programs, and dietary support for people living with HIV/AIDS and school feeding programs. In Uganda, one out of every two meals distributed by WFP is a gift of the United States.



Ambassador Hall meets doctors and nurses who staff Gulu Hospital, home to a therapeutic and supplemental feeding center run by Action Against Hunger, an HIV/AIDS clinic and an orthopedic workshop.

office administrator who seemed mature for her 29 years.

Olwal IDP camp is home to more than 21,000 people and is supported by World Food Program (WFP) school feeding initiative. “Kids come for the food,” said one of the camp leaders, referring to the overflowing classrooms at the camp’s school. Attendance is up from 1,474 to 1,760 students. The shortage is not in students but rather an adequate number of teachers (currently there are 12) and equipment. Children are asked to contribute some money for firewood and some food items.

Other issues for the camp included poor water sanitation and the growing population. At a health clinic we were told about the health effects on women – especially pregnant and lactating mothers – who must walk far to their gardens. (Many people who live as IDPs try to maintain small plots away from the camps.)

During the morning of March 22, a visit was made to the Gulu Orthopedic Workshop, which provides trauma and job counseling and assembles and fits

prostheses for landmine victims. A therapeutic feeding center run by Action Against Hunger was crowded with women and their infants sitting on the ground amid the medical buildings. The center feeds the severely malnourished and treats ailments such as thrush and edema.

Nearby is the AIDS Support Organization (TASO). Through the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for Aid Relief, or PEPFAR, TASO was able to move into a new facility that offers counseling, medical services, and nutritional support. The bricks-and-mortar project was impressive and we hope it can serve the community for years to come. TASO plans to have antiretroviral therapy for 500 clients, though more than 3,000 clients have been registered.

That afternoon, Hall met with Acholi Paramount Chief David Onen Acana, a 2004 participant in the State Department’s International Visitors’ Program, and also with Archbishop John Baptist Odama, the current chair of the Acholi Religious Leaders’ Peace Initiative, which provides community-based mediation services, advocacy, and peace-building activities. The Ambassador heard the leaders discuss the necessity and appropriateness for granting amnesty to children abducted and later, sadly, often engaged in committing atrocities. Ambassador Hall commended the men and their community for making the difficult act of forgiveness the focus of their peace efforts.

Looking Ahead

We have great hope that the government of Uganda will succeed in ending this brutal war. Hope exists mainly because of an agreement between Sudan and Uganda that allows Ugandan military forces to root out the LRA in Southern Sudan, which had been a safe haven for the group for many years.

In the meantime, the United States is committed to the dire humanitarian situation that continues every day for more than a million people. Once again, the Acholis missed a planting season because of the security situation. Ambassador Hall was honored to announce a \$27 million injection of funds to the World Food Program to help feed hungry people (See page 9).

Ethiopia: Risks and Rewards of a New Approach to Aid

Perhaps more than any other country in the world, Ethiopia evokes images of the bloated bellies of malnourished children and the vacant stares of their hungry parents. The Great Famine, as the crisis of 1984-85 is called, has since become a barometer for the country to compare subsequent droughts.

To insure that such devastation never happens again, the government of Ethiopia is moving forward on improving long-term food and livelihood security for more than five million vulnerable citizens through the Food Security Program of the “New Coalition for Food and Livelihood Security in Ethiopia.”

Part of the new program is the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), a strategy designed to manage the transition from an emergency response-dominated program to one that builds capacity to prevent famine and protect the assets of the chronically food insecure and facilitate participation in a larger development agenda. The government has estimated that 9.2 million beneficiaries will require combined safety net and emergency assistance this year (5.4 million under safety nets and 3.8 million under the emergency appeal). However, given the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in several hotspot woredas, it is evident that current levels of assistance are inadequate to meet true humanitarian needs.



The U.S. delegation on its way in Nazareth, Ethiopia to visit an 8-year-old orphan with HIV/AIDS. He is receiving food support from World Food Program.

This aggressive approach is critical to the 70+ million Ethiopians who suffer from one of the world's highest incidences of malnutrition and one of the lowest primary-education enrollment ratios. HIV/AIDS is an issue of increasing concern, which is as high as 12.6 percent in urban areas. Its chronically food insecure population is vulnerable and often has emergency food needs, primarily because of drought, environmental degradation and low access to and availability of food. The country placed 170 out of 177 countries on the UNDP Human Development Report for 2004.

The United States is the largest donor of food aid assistance to Ethiopia. In calendar year 2005 more than 360,000 metric tons of food aid was delivered to WFP and other non-governmental organizations (NGO) at a value of more than \$170 million. Our development assistance is increasing in the country, having doubled to \$110 million since 2003 according to USAID Ethiopia.

Dangerous Road Ahead

Ethiopia's miles and miles of highways are among the deadliest. And it is not because of traffic accidents. The prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS is highest along the 1,200 miles of transportation routes, where a highly mobile population lives, works and, unfortunately, spreads the deadly disease.

The town of Nazareth, southeast of Addis Ababa in the Oromiya region, is where we met Nebeyu, an 8-year-old orphan whose HIV/AIDS symptoms have subsided thanks to food and nutritional support he receives through the World Food Program. Without food, the medicines used to treat Nebeyu are not only ineffective but also poisonous.

Nebeyu is supported by a joint project that supports Ethiopia's High-Risk Corridor initiative. Now funded under PEPFAR, the program has been run by Save the Children/USA since July 2001. Its purpose is to strengthen food and nutritional support for HIV/AIDS infected and affected individuals and households and to stabilize school attendance.

The warehouse that stores food for Nebeyu and thousands of others was a short walk from the young boy's home. The Government of Ethiopia donated the space; the food is provided by the U.S. and other donors to the World Food Program. Its



Seen through a metal fence, women with or affected by HIV/AIDS clear a former dumping ground in Addis Ababa to plant vegetable crops.

beneficiaries are a mix of people in the community who have been affected by HIV/AIDS: orphans and vulnerable children, infected or malnourished pregnant or lactating mothers and their children, and the home-based care providers of HIV/AIDS patients.

Birhane Hailegabriel, commodity coordinator for Save the Children U.S.A., discussed with the delegation the importance of patients eating enough food. “Even if a person asymptomatic, we must increase their nutritional status so they will remain symptom-free. Once the symptoms begin to occur, the need for calories is even greater because the body’s system is unable to tolerate the anti retro viral drugs unless it is properly fed.”

Not Counted, Not Fed

Concerns about the Safety Net Program and its ability to stave off hunger while bringing economic stability were heightened during a food distribution in the Dodota Sire woreda, or county. It was there we learned that the number of beneficiaries had been grossly underestimated. A local government official told us that they have 38,000 people “on the books” but the reality was that the numbers were

closer to 58,000. This was a disturbing situation that was reiterated to several government officials during meetings the following day.

Not far from the food distribution we were met by a large group of people from Arbagosa who showed the obvious signs of malnutrition and were certainly among the Ethiopians who risk “falling through the cracks” of the government’s new PSNP. Because the PSNP program got off to such a late start (it was supposed to launch in January 2005 but by late March there were still programs being put into place) many had found themselves lacking food. There were signs of skin rashes, coughing, respiratory problems

and vitamin deficiency, the latter manifested through the orange hair of the young African children. Arbagosa was a palpable example of the gap that exists between the goal of the safety net and the reality of emergency feeding.

At the Doni Primary School, the lunch line had already formed by the time the delegation arrived. Asefach Chenelee, one of 15 teachers at the school, said that since the school began hosting a WFP school feeding program in September 2004, enrollment has skyrocketed to 1,500 children, up from 800 students. The larger problem is infrastructure – too many children and not enough desks, supplies and space.

A Model Program for the Urban Poor

Among the most of the most promising projects visited on the trip was City Gardens. Funded by USAID, the urban agricultural project targets low-income women who either are infected or affected by HIV/AIDS. The fact that the program was operating in downtown Addis Ababa is critical, since most humanitarian organizations focus their programming almost exclusively on beneficiaries living in rural communities.

Some of the 4,500 beneficiaries were clearing the former dump as we arrived. Already there were

Northern Uganda and Ethiopia: Where Peace and Plenty Remain Elusive



Thanks to donors and World Food Program, it's lunchtime at a school in Dodota Sire, Ethiopia.

signs of a harvest. By growing only vegetables — such as potatoes, swiss chards, carrots, garlic, beets, lettuce, cabbage — the women can reap three to four harvests a year. The hope is that the women will soon be feeding not only themselves but also have some vegetables to sell, thus increasing their food security and their financial security.

The delegation met with Ethiopian officials including Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, Deputy Prime Minister Addisu Legesse, and Simon Mechale, Commissioner of the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (DPPC) and head of the department responsible for emergency feeding programs. Ambassador Hall used each visit to discuss his impressions of Safety Net and emergency programs while underlining his concern that people may be falling through the cracks during this critical startup time for the Safety Net Program.

The Ambassador also urged officials to reassess the estimates made last fall of people who would be in need. One of the underlying potential causes of the underestimation is that numbers were assessed last fall when there was a brighter outlook for the harvest season. While in some areas the estimation was accurate, other regions failed to produce the anticipated harvest. As a result there are more people today who are in need of food assistance than were originally expected.

Reports since the visit indicated that a hunger

crisis was looming. The Government of Ethiopia eventually agreed to reassess some regions, but there remained intense concern that their slowness to respond, along with the delay of food assistance for Safety Net participants and a lack of donor response to the emergency appeal would cause widespread malnutrition, hunger and death for many Ethiopians.

Field of Hope

PAO Carla Benini and USAID's Phil Lamade spent their Saturday with FAO officials. Victoria Sekitoleko, FAO representative in Ethiopia, lead the group to a wonderful women's farm cooperative. Once jobless, the 62 women were busy guiding oxen as they prepared the land for planting. The 10-year-old association received a grant of \$17,000 from FAO for seeds, oxen, training and an irrigation pump that has enabled the coop to irrigate 22 hectares of land using a nearby river.

The ebullient group said the grant has transformed their output and their lives. Members have gone from earning 20 Birr per month to 300 Birr per month or about US\$34. They currently sell only wholesale, supplying 60 to 70 percent of vegetables in their city. They hope to begin selling directly to customers.

Victoria also showed us a project that FAO was



Women members of a farmers cooperative outside Addis Ababa. Thanks to a grant from Food and Agricultural Organization, their profits have soared.

Northern Uganda and Ethiopia: Where Peace and Plenty Remain Elusive

considering funding at the time of our visit. The Ethio-Amdas Agro-Industry is an ambitious project that aims to provide a link between local farmers and international buyers. The business plans to raise flowers, fruits, vegetables, livestock and improved seeds. It would also run a processing plant on the grounds of the farm. The project would boost profits from farms, create employment opportunities and forge international business partners.

Looking Ahead

We applaud the government of Ethiopia's efforts to transition from an emergency response-dominated program to one that builds capacity to prevent famine. We recognize that the radically different approach to aid is in its infancy and it will take time to examine and address any shortfalls.

However, we are hearing reports of worsening food situations that need an urgent response. People who had been identified as part of the Safety Net are falling into the Emergency category, and yet are not getting the necessary food rations. We urge the government of Ethiopia to work with USAID, UN and NGO officials to address the situation head-on, before the situation becomes another humanitarian crisis.

Personal Comment from Ambassador Hall

I was in Uganda in the 1990s and I will never forget the faces of some young schoolgirls I met, beautiful and yet permanently scarred by an evil group called the Lord's Resistance Army. Back then, the rebel group seemed disorganized and likely to dismantle. Ten years later, the atrocities continue. Those young girls were part of the reason why I wanted to return.

The United States has been a good friend to Uganda and I was anxious to share that story with those I have met. Having been to the Congo, Rwanda and East Timor, I can tell you I have never seen anything like Northern Uganda. I have never seen such a war targeted against children.

After traveling to Ethiopia for more than 20 years, the country continues to teach me. I am excited about the government's new approach to aid, one that is based on the belief that we can lift people from poverty and put them on the road to economic self-sufficiency if we can just give them a little help. I applaud these efforts, and yet can't help being intensely concerned that in the push to put people on this new road, we leave others behind. We must not neglect today's emergency needs by focusing solely on tomorrow's development needs, nor viceversa.



Ambassador Hall surrounded by the people of Arbabogosa in Ethiopia's Oromiya Region, where children were showing acute signs of malnourishment.